**In brief**

The government is being urged to pay 'travel bursaries' to nursing students living in remote rural areas. Liberal Democrat MP Andrew George claims hefty travel costs are causing financial hardship for many students.

A project aimed at helping nurses in Wales get the information they need was launched last week by the RCN and the Welsh National Board. Library Services for Nurses in Wales is available online at www.nursing-libraries.org.uk

Nurses helping run primary care groups feel the profession is being well-represented on PCG boards, a Manchester University study has found. But concerns were raised that community nurses outnumber practice nurses by three to one on the boards.

An education programme to help nurse prescribers avoid potential pitfalls is available from the Medical Protection Society. For details call Juliet Roberts on 020 8288 0444.

Guidelines to universities on the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), the system used to measure a student's previous experience, are being produced by Anglia Polytechnic University. For details contact Andy Shattock at a.d.shattock@anglia.ac.uk

**Wards will be checked for compliance with guidelines on cleanliness and training**

Hospitals to implement nurses' hygiene standards

By Graham Scott

HYGIENE STANDARDS drawn up by nurses were sent to every trust in England last week as part of the government's drive to clean up hospital wards.

Ministers also announced that the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the Audit Commission would inspect wards to check that the standards are implemented.

Health secretary Alan Milburn revealed at RCN Congress last month that he planned to insist on implementation of the standards, published last year by the Infection Control Nurses Association and the Association of Domestic Management. The standards cover the management of body fluid spillage, staff training and contracts with cleaning companies.

Announcing their implementation last week, health minister Gisela Stuart said: 'The standards are explicit statements of best practice. They have been produced by people working in the NHS. People who work in the system know best where it is going wrong and how we can improve it.'

The government followed up her announcement by revealing that hygiene and catering standards would be checked by CHI and the Audit Commission.

Health minister John Denham said this would be accompanied by an audit of food services, which will involve a nurse and a dietician spending a day at 25 hospitals observing the delivery of meals and identifying best practice.

A national Patients Food Group is also being set up in a bid to improve catering standards.

RCN general secretary Christine Hancock said: 'We have argued strongly that the essentials of care - nutrition, cleanliness, dignity and privacy - are at the heart of nursing and should be included in the government's quality agenda for the NHS.

'Lack of privacy, poor food, dirty wards and nurses with little time to listen are the things that most upset patients and nurses.'

Singled out:

Belfast ward manager Pauline Sheridan (centre) was last week presented with the RCN Northern Ireland Nurse 2000 award by RCN general secretary Christine Hancock (left) and last year's overall winner Sandra Peake. For the full list of awards see pages 16 and 17

Primary care nurses fear being 'stormtroopers'

PRIMARY CARE nurses spend 60 per cent of their time addressing mental health issues that they are often not trained to deal with, according to the RCN Institute's mental health programme director.

Martin Ward told a Commons health committee inquiry last week that stress levels of school nurses, paediatric nurses and health visitors are soaring because of the government's increased emphasis on treating mental health patients in the community.

He said primary care nurses fear becoming 'stormtroopers' placed in dangerous situations if Community Treatment Orders (CTOs) - compulsory treatments imposed on mental health patients living in the community - are introduced.

'A UKCC survey shows primary care nurses spend 60 per cent of their time on mental health issues,' he told the MPs on the committee. 'But the organisations that employ them don't recognise this.

'The national service framework (NSF) is putting a great emphasis on primary care. We could be left with many members being asked to do something they haven't been trained for.

'I've yet to hear a community practice nurse say CTOs are a good thing. We have a concern that nurses would be used as stormtroopers simply because there's a lack of hospital beds. If the person badly needs to be treated they should be in hospital.'

Mr Ward supported the idea of care in the community but called for more resources and co-operation between professions to make it work. He warned that mental health workers would leave their jobs 'in droves' if the NSF fails.